

On Friday we were in Birmingham, where we visited the 16th Street Baptist Church and lay a wreath in memory of the four young girls who were murdered in 1963 when the Ku Klux Klan bombed their church. We also toured the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, a museum dedicated to chronicling the struggle for equality in the southern United States and providing a forum for reflection and dialogue on the Civil Rights Movement.



Saturday we visited Montgomery, considered by many the mother of the civil rights movement. We toured the Rosa Parks Museum, and Congressman Lewis led us to the First Baptist Church where he, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, and other civil rights leaders were nearly killed by a mob during 1961's Freedom Ride. Saturday also included a visit to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the nonprofit legal center founded by Morris Dees, which works today to root out and eradicate hate groups. The SPLC is best known for its legal actions against the KKK and neo-Nazi groups.

Sunday marked the 45th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, one of the most inspiring events in the civil rights movement, when 600 peaceful marchers were attacked by Alabama State Troopers while attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge at the start of a protest march from Selma to Montgomery. On Sunday, I stood with my colleagues from Congress while Congressman

John Lewis, who still bears the scars of the beatings he endured while crossing the bridge, described the events of that day. As we stood, shoulder to shoulder, I was reminded of Dr. King's words – "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality . . . whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

The Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage is an opportunity for us to forget the partisan bickering going on in Washington for a time, to focus instead on what brings us together, and to remember that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. We must always remember that the triumphs of the past can outshine the tragedies of the past, but that depends on us.

For more about the Congressional Civil Rights Pilgrimage, click [here](#) .